

**Public Hearing on Immigrant Integration
Sacramento
May 24, 2001**

Testimony by Sister Marilyn Lacey
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County

Clarifying Terminology

- Immigrant (business visa, or family reunification visa)
- Asylee
- Refugee
- Non-immigrant (tourists, foreign students, et al.)

Clarifying Roles: "There's a fundamental challenge in Calif: the State doesn't have a coherent policy on immigrants." (Neither does the Federal gov't or any other country!)

How Catholic Charities is involved with immigrants, refugees and asylees

Our vision is that those who are marginalized will realize full participation in community life. Mission to serve and advocate for those in need, esp. the poor, to create a more just and compassionate community in which people of all beliefs and cultures can participate.

CC exists to meet local needs; therefore, each CC configures its services accordingly. In Silicon Valley, where 60% of the population is foreign-born or the children of foreign-born, we have naturally designed many of our services around the needs of immigrants.

CC in Silicon Valley focuses on long-term change in people's lives; we do not do emergency services. Rather than operate a food pantry, we teach new job skills and place newcomers into unsubsidized employment. Rather than visit the jails, we have gang intervention and violence prevention programs in immigrant neighborhoods. Rather than run homeless shelters, we build affordable housing units, and we promote shared housing arrangements for single parent households so that rent is more affordable. Rather than operate day worker centers for the undocumented, we manage a non-profit immigration law firm to help the undocumented obtain work permits and legal status, whenever that is possible. Ultimately, we desire naturalization for all eligible newcomers, so that they become voting, contributing members of our changing society.

Our goal is always to build upon the strengths of newcomers, to promote the American value of independence, and to empower neighborhoods and communities to work for their own improvement.

Catholic Charities' Strategies for promoting immigrant self-reliance and success

- Lifelong learning (language and cultural orientation and ongoing education)
- Economic Self-Sufficiency (employment, skills training, career upgrades, savings programs)

- Quality of Life Issues (safety, health, affordable housing, socialization, economic security, success in school and workplace)
- Integration into American Society (immigration status, cultural diversity and acceptance, volunteerism, "giving back to the community," civic participation)

Measuring success one person at a time:

Maria: only surviving witness to the murder in El Salvador 10 yrs ago of 4 Jesuits and their housekeeper...traumatized; terrified by CIA interrogations; given asylum via CC.

Nyicwei: a refugee since age of 6 in southern Sudan; now 19, working at Macy's.

Zack: involved in failed uprising against Saddam Hussein in Iraq; jailed & tortured; nuclear physicist and engineer. Agonized over fate of wife and 3 young children; now reunited in San Jose; employed fulltime.

Lorena: former gang member; now working in our immigrant youth street outreach prog.

Abuola: university student imprisoned and tortured in West Africa; now entering SclaraUniversity this Fall.

Measuring success in the aggregate:

With youth: lowering the drop out rate; raising GPA;

With refugees: fulltime employment, indep housing, tracked 6 yrs until citizenship

With abused women: legal status, work permits, freedom from fear.

With immigrant communities: signing families up for health insurance, forming local organizations, getting city ordinances changed, having voter registration drives, etc.

With the larger community: involving the American-born with the foreign-born to lessen stereotypes and prejudices; inviting church congregations of all faith traditions to partner with us in welcoming refugees, organizing neighborhoods for self-improvement, etc.

Which needs are most easily addressed, and which present the greatest challenges?

RELATIVELY EASY	MUCH MORE CHALLENGING
Learning English	Intercultural understanding and acceptance
Getting jobs for newcomers	Get jobs that pay a living wage and provide employee benefits
Tapping the talent from many cultures	Health coverage and public health issues
	Affordable housing
	Family reunification
	Values clashes; intergenerational tension; social isolation
	Building ethnic community organizations
	Dealing with the INS

Suggested Guidelines for Public Policy in California regarding Immigrants

Goals	Why?	How?
Reunite Families & ensure that Basic Needs are Met	Stabilizes the community; reduces crime; improves public health and general economic well-being	<p>Advocate nationally for increased staffing of the INS offices in California, and for reducing the waiting time for family visas</p> <p>Provide preventive health screening for the uninsured, especially the undocumented (acute care is far more costly to the State than prevention measures would be)</p>
Strengthen the Economy	Strong economy benefits everyone.	<p>Alan Greenspan: "What this country needs is more immigration!"</p> <p>Immigration creates jobs & increases the size of the pie; ethnic diversity translates into global competitiveness and high levels of entrepreneurial activity; employers need workers at all levels (not just high-tech, but also nursing and home care and entry-level).</p> <p>Immigration is essential to the solvency of our social security system now and in the future (nearly 50% of immigrants are ages 18-25, compared to 25% of the general population). De-criminalize "illegal immigration."</p> <p>Revise the state's welfare policies in order to make "the working poor" eligible for critically needed support services (e.g., childcare). Avoid bifurcation of the Calif economy into very rich and very poor.</p> <p>Work with Mexico to strengthen Mexico's economy.</p>
Encourage full Civic Participation	Democracy works best when everyone can participate	<p>Fund cmty-based organizations that help the undocumented to become legal.</p> <p>Invest in education! Consider allowing the undocumented to attend higher education. This will reduce both the high-school drop-out rate and youth gangs.</p>

		Support naturalization campaigns and local efforts for neighborhood-strengthening .
Fight Discrimination; Promote Human Rights	Discrimination at any level is an affront to the basic human dignity of each of us.	<p>Stop employer abuses of workers (sweatshops, etc.), train police on cultural issues, eliminate housing and job discrimination toward those who appear foreign.</p> <p>Encourage counties and cities in California NOT to house INS detainees (especially asylum seekers) in their own local jails.</p> <p>Celebrate diversity.</p>